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Identical letters dated 7 June 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I wish to draw your attention to the following.

The Syrian Arab Republic has adopted a transparent and credible approach in laying out the facts of what is happening in Syria. In that context, it wishes to present the preliminary findings of the national committee of investigation into the horrific and disgraceful Hula massacre. The investigation has been open and transparent, and the Government has shown full cooperation. The witnesses who provided information came from the region in question. Syria has announced the preliminary findings of the investigations in keeping with its self-imposed commitment to establish a national committee of investigation and to present its preliminary findings within three days of its establishment. Eyewitness accounts of the massacre are also provided, but the Government has not disclosed the witnesses' identities owing to fear of reprisals against them by armed terrorist groups.

The preliminary conclusions of the report issued by the judicial committee responsible for investigating the Hula massacre indicates that all of the victims came from non-violent families that refused to rise against the State; they had never once demonstrated or carried weapons, and were opposed to the armed terrorist groups. The victims were killed by close-range gunfire and sharp instruments, rather than by bombardments.

The preliminary conclusions show that the armed terrorist groups that gathered in Hula eliminated the victims in the course of an attack against law enforcement forces. The latter did not enter the area in which the massacre took place. A large number of the bodies were those of terrorists who had been killed in the clash with law enforcement forces.

Staff Brigadier General Jamal Qasim al-Sulayman, the Chair of the committee investigating the massacre, said that findings were preliminary; the investigation is continuing, with due consideration for the protection of witnesses and evidence.

Al-Sulayman added that the committee of investigation was formed pursuant to Administrative Order No. 42 of 28 May 2012 issued by the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces. The investigation relied on directly verifiable accounts, which were provided by directly concerned individuals who had been exposed to the horrifying massacre. The preliminary report relied on evidence and facts regarding the armed attack on law enforcement forces in the town.

The Chair of the committee explained that law enforcement forces had been based at five positions in the Hula area, and that the armed attack on the area had been intended to fully eliminate the presence of the State and bring the area outside State control.

Al-Sulayman stated that the armed men had gathered inside the village after Friday prayers and launched a simultaneous attack with support from between 600 and 800 other armed men. The latter had entered the area in coordination with the local armed men, coming from such neighbouring areas as Rastan, Si'n, Burj Qa'i and Sam'alin. Every type of heavy weapon was used: mortars, machine guns and every variety of armour-piercing missile. They focused on two law enforcement positions which were the fundamental target of the premeditated attack. The first, known as al-Qaws, was at the entrance of the village of Tall Daww. The second was at the Clock roundabout.

Al-Sulayman said that the armed groups from outside the village then simultaneously began to eliminate non-violent families in the course of the attack on the law enforcement positions.

Al-Sulayman pointed out that the massacre took place in an area where armed terrorist groups were present. Law enforcement officers did not enter that area before or after the massacre. It is at some distance from their checkpoints, where the armed terrorist groups had mounted lethal operations against them. They did not leave their position, as they were defending themselves against the terrorist groups. This can be verified by looking at the pictures of the victims which were shown on the satellite channels. The pictures show that the massacre was perpetrated using close-range gunfire and sharp instruments. It was not a result of artillery fire; the bodies of the victims did not show any sign of crushing, burning, or wounds caused by falling walls or artillery shrapnel. All of the foregoing shows that what took place was direct elimination.

The preliminary data available to the committee indicates that armed groups set up five mortars in and around the town of Tall Daww, in order to target any law enforcement forces that might enter the town. It was noticed that a significant number of the victims were children. Killing those children would bring no benefit to the law enforcement officers or the State. Rather, it served an intended objective of the armed terrorist groups, namely to instigate strife, spread conflict and undermine the unity of the nation — something that goes against the interests of the State and the Army.

The Chair of the investigating committee stated that verifications and direct testimonies from inside the area show that all of the victims of the massacre came from non-violent families that had refused to rise against the State; they had never

once demonstrated or carried weapons, and were opposed to the armed terrorist groups. Those groups therefore had an interest and a purpose in killing them: to bring about a humanitarian and military intervention in the country, in whatever form, and to get rid of a nuisance that could propagate the use of reason and the promotion of national stability to other countries in the region.

The primary target of the massacre were the relatives of a member of Parliament, Abdulmu'ti Mashlab. The aim was to wreak revenge against him for having defied the perpetrators by standing for office and being elected to Parliament. That was before their plan was overtaken by events and the massacre extended to other families.

Al-Sulayman pointed out that because there had been an intensive presence of armed men in the area for some time, no group could have entered the area without their knowledge, or the knowledge of groups affiliated with them. Some of the bodies that were displayed as part of the massacre were in fact those of armed men from outside the town who had been killed during their attack on law enforcement forces.

Al-Sulayman emphasized that the massacre carried out by armed terrorist groups is part of a plan to make the international community believe that Syria is on the brink of civil war, coinciding with the arrival of the United Nations Special Envoy Kofi Annan. The plan stems from the groups' failure in targeting Syria, which has shown genuine cooperation with all constructive initiatives.

It is also important to point out that the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed immediately to allow international observers to go to the site of the massacre. When they arrived, there were both martyrs and armed men who had been killed in the clash. The latter were added to the victims of the massacre. The bodies were taken to the village mosque in the armed men's cars to be photographed, in order to make it seem as though the massacre was of that magnitude. The observers were then subjected to a flood of lies in front of the camera, pictures that would be seen around the world.

We also wish to draw your attention to other massacres on which we have shed light, such as those of Karm al-Zaytun and Dayr Ba'albah. The Syrian Government was accused of perpetrating them, but that story later turned out to be incorrect. An investigation is under way, and further leads are being discovered that have a connection with this massacre. The international media has focused on certain massacres as opposed to others because a particular confessional group was involved. In Syria, we refuse to consider any Syrian on the basis of his confessional identity, and will continue to do so. Syria will not allow itself to behave in such a manner.

We wish to inform you that there are circles, shady rooms, that are working around the clock to strike at the fabric of Syrian society by sparking sectarian conflict. Even after the Hula massacre, an attempt was made to target another village with a different sectarian fabric; however, the armed terrorist groups were unsuccessful in doing so.

Terrorist operations and bombings have recently gathered pace in Syria. The committee set out some of those incidents in its oral update. The question is who stands to benefit from the escalating bombings and terrorist operations. Syria respects its international commitments and has signed an understanding and a

preliminary six-point plan. At the same time, however, there are stated commitments on the other side that should be implemented. There are States whose ministers for foreign affairs openly declare that they are arming, funding and harbouring terrorists. It follows that there is a side that does not stand to gain from the Annan plan, whose success would also be a success for Syria.

In his speech before Parliament on 3 June 2012, on the occasion of the first legislative session of Parliament under the new constitution, the President of the Republic highlighted the horror of the Hula massacre and pointed out that it had been used in the most abject manner for propaganda against Syria:

> "We have described what happened in Hula, in Qazaz and Maydan (two terrorist explosions that hit Damascus), in Dayr al-Zawr (a massacre a few days before, in which armed terrorist groups killed 11 labourers who were going to work, and which those groups sought to blame on Syria), Aleppo (a terrorist explosion that struck the city) and many other parts of Syria, as despicable and barbaric massacres. In fact, even barbarians would not commit the actions we have seen, particularly the Hula massacre. I doubt if Arabic language, or even the language of humanity as a whole, can describe what we have seen (...).
>
> After the despicable Hula massacre, they accused the armed forces. At first, they said that artillery and tanks had been used. Then they instantly reversed that story because they felt where the people's support lay. They realized that to accuse the armed forces of a crime was to accuse every Syrian citizen, without exception, of being a criminal and a terrorist. So they moved on to talking about so-called pro-Government militias."

The latter story is not true either, as is clear from the committee's preliminary findings referred to above.

As regards witnesses to the crime, extracts of the statements of two witnesses are given below. Their identities have been withheld in order to protect them from reprisals from armed terrorist groups.

The first, male witness stated as follows:

> "Three days before the massacre, they were talking about something that would happen on Friday, something special, something big. They kept talking about it, so much that we were longing to know what the big event would be.
>
> On Friday, after the noon prayer, a unit of armed men gathered in the northern quarter, near the checkpoint at the Clock roundabout. Other large groups headed towards what we call the Sadd road — which is officially called Tripoli road — and to the area known as Nasiriya, Sittu road and the road with the Abu Zayd pastry shop, which leads to the Al-Zahir family's marble workshop.
>
> The armed group in the northern quarter began to shoot into the air in order to occupy the Clock checkpoint and create the impression that they would open fire at it and attack it. It would be very difficult to reach or control it from those areas.
>
> I went to the Sadd road. I was with some large groups: the Salafi Khalid Abu al-Wahid group, the Abdulmalik al-Salih group, the Nidal Bakkur group, the Haytham al-Hisan group, the Ikrimah group, a group from Aqrab, one from

Kafr Laha, one from Tall Dhahab, and many outsiders who were heavily armed. They opened random fire on the law enforcement station, hitting it as well as civilians and homes.

Many of them did not know how to use weapons. One of them was using a PKC machine gun but lost control of it and was thrown backwards. Another launched a rocket-propelled grenade, which looks like a mortar shell but has a small propeller at the rear. Instead of the station, it hit the Zukahi family home, killing two people. All of this happened in full view of the armed men."

The eyewitness added that most of the victims died because the armed men were on their way to eliminate a particular family. The family included a member of Parliament; had not been on demonstrations; had sided with the State and kept away from trouble; and had money that had not been spent or donated to buy guns for the armed men. There was also an element of retaliation and long-standing family rivalries. The Al-Sayyid family was closely connected to the member of Parliament, and they wanted to "give him a present for his success in Parliament".

The witness also said:

"The Al-Hisan group hate the Al-Sayyid family intensely. They are killers. Their business is not revolution; it is abduction, killing, plundering and stealing petrol from pipelines, and they have funds totalling millions. This group was in front of the Al-Sayyid home on the other side of the road, next to the Abu Zayd pastry shop. They spread out and opened random fire. Their weapons were not trained on the law enforcement station, but in the opposite direction, towards the home of Uqbah al-Sayyid, his brother, his sister-in-law and the children who died. There was another home next to the Al-Sayyid home, which belonged to a relative of Nidal Bakkur. Why were its owners spared, when their neighbours were killed?

On the other side were the Al-Gharar family home and the Haddu family home or the Ali Bakkur family home, and nothing happened to them — so why target that house specifically? The same applies to the Abdurrazzaq family home. There are other houses next to it. One is the Zahir Bakkur household — why did nothing happen to it? The same goes for the houses of the Harmush family, where there was a mathematics teacher from the Na'san family — why did nothing happen to him or to his family? His house was next to the law enforcement station, only five metres away. The massacre happened because the armed men wished to target those families".

Using a map of Tall Daww, the eyewitness explained the locations of the homes in which the crimes took place; the location of the law enforcement station and checkpoints; the places where the armed men gathered; and how they carried out their planned and premeditated attacks.

The second, female eyewitness said:

"Last Friday, leaving aside the Friday before it, there was a large number of armed men, and many unfamiliar faces, in the Tall Daww area. The armed men started shelling the law enforcement checkpoint from our quarter. The shooter was called Fayiz al-Uksh. The checkpoint officers noticed him and returned fire, hitting him in the leg. He was taken to the field hospital in Kafr Laha.

They then opened heavy fire on the checkpoint. Other groups were receiving communications, which we could hear. We could hear them talking to one another on radio telephones. The larger unit of armed men was in the Nasiriya area and the Sadd area opposite the second checkpoint, known as the station, which had been burned. Another unit would stay where we were as a decoy for the law enforcement checkpoint.

There were several groups: one from Aqrab, one from Kafr Laha, one from Tall Dhahab, one from Tayyibah and several from Rastan. They were talking on radio telephones, which we could hear. They would say to one another, "Get me the Tall Dhahab group", or the Aqrab group, or the Rastan group.

The groups included outsiders to our village, whom we were seeing there for the first time. There were people from Tallaf and Burj, but not very many.

The attack on the checkpoints happened at the same time, at around 1.30 p.m. When the military position fell, several of its officers lay dead, as did a great number of the armed men; they spent some three hours transporting them.

The armed men shelled a BRDM armoured vehicle; we could see the smoke rising from it. They stole the ammunition and weapons from the station and took them to the northern quarter, to their own location, handing them around to one another.

The armed men set fire to the station immediately after looting it. They also set fire to the hospital and the trees behind it, which are close to Sadd and the National Hospital. When we went there, we found the trees charred.

After the position fell, I heard one of the men, whose name was Ikrimah al-Salih, talking on the radio telephone to two men called Nidal Bakkur and Khalid Abdulwahid. Nidal Bakkur was saying to him, "Send me a group of outsiders because we have a second operation". At that point, Haytham al-Hallam was walking and carrying a cleaver in addition to his weapon. He went over to the Nasiriya group, a group of some 200 armed men which he led. This was one of the biggest groups, and it was already specialized in theft and abduction.

The attack on the station took place directly from the area of Nasiriya and the Sadd road. After they gained control of the station, Nidal and Khalid talked, and outsider groups were sent to them. The person at the other end of the line said, "I'll send you the Aqrab group". It seems that he did not know who was the leader of that group. He must have asked who was in charge of it, because the other speaker mentioned the leader's name, saying, "the leader of the Aqrab group is called Yahiya al-You". The Kafr Laha group was not mentioned because they all knew about it.

The groups went towards the reservoir, where there were roads leading to the Sadd road. At around 7 p.m., we heard that the massacre had taken place. So only two hours had elapsed between the fall of the law enforcement station and the massacre.

By 8 p.m., they had moved the victims in cars to a mosque to the north, far away from the war zone that they were in. It was the Ram mosque. A man called Ghazi al-You then called and said, "Send me some Kea cars".

We saw them travelling in cars at 8 p.m., by which time the law enforcement station had fallen completely and Army reinforcements had not yet arrived.

The victims were from the Al-Sayyid family. Mu'awiya al-Sayyid was an officer in the Army, and had not deserted. Of course he was the target, because anyone who does not desert is a target and his life is in danger. He believed his life depended on his home being near the law enforcement checkpoint, and so did not want to leave the village.

There's a second household of the Al-Sayyid family, and there is a third one related to Abdulmu'ti Mashlab, whose election as a parliamentary secretary had been announced. And there was the Abdulrazzaq family. I know that they are loyal, except for one household that is armed. The Abdurrazzaq family is made up of four households, which were attacked. Their homes were on the Sadd road, behind the law enforcement station and near the river.

The Al-Sayyid family home was next to the armed men. If some of the so-called *shabiha* came and killed them, then why did they not also kill the children of the armed men? Why did the killing take place in those houses specifically? There are many other houses next to those of the armed men from the Al-Hallaq family, who are known among us as the Al-Hisan family, and the Abdurrazzaq family and the Bakkur family. Why did nobody from the Bakkur family die? Why did they target children only in the Abdurrazzaq family?

There was also a household of the Fa'ur family, all of whom were armed men. The famous cameraman is also a Fa'ur. One of them died and another instantly took his place. He is a cameraman for Al-Jazeera. Why did none of them die, when their houses were full of people?

The large number of bodies that they took out for the observers to be displayed as victims of the bombardment, were mostly those of the armed men, in addition to those of the other families that died."

I should be grateful if this letter could be circulated as a document of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly under agenda item 109, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic